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Dayan says Israelis able to make A-bombs quickly

By Larry Thorson
Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel — Former Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan said yesterday that Israel can make atomic bombs quickly and will do so if the Arabs introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East.

It was the most definitive statement in years by an Israeli figure on the country's nuclear capability. One of Prime Minister Menachem Begin's aides said he was shocked by Dayan's remarks.

Dayan's words appeared likely to stoke the nuclear controversy raging in the troubled region since Israeli warplanes destroyed Iraq's nuclear reactor June 7. Israel claimed that the Iraqis were planning to build atomic bombs for use against Israel.

The Dayan statement came a day after President Saddam Hussein of Iraq said "all peace-loving nations" should help the Arabs acquire atomic bombs to counter Israel's nuclear capability.

Begin responded yesterday to Hussein's comments by promising Israel would use force to block any Arab atomic-weapon aspirations. "These weapons will be destroyed before they are developed," Begin declared at an election rally.

Dayan spoke to an Italian television interviewer at his home in Zaha-la, outside Tel Aviv, and confirmed his statement by telephone to a reporter.

"Israel has the ability to quickly produce nuclear weapons and will do so if the Arabs obtain atomic bombs," he told the reporter.

Dayan emphasized Israel's long-stated policy on nuclear weapons,



Moshe Dayan
Shocked Begin aide with remarks

saying, "We will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East," but he added, "We shall also not be too late."

Dayan said Israel had "never thought of using nuclear weapons" in its wars against the Arabs, "but the picture changes completely when we think of the possibility that leaders like Saddam Hussein and Moammar Khadafy [of Libya] might possess such weapons."

Libya has a tiny Soviet reactor, and

an aide to Khadafy was quoted as telling an Arab newspaper yesterday, "We must not be caught unprepared if the Zionists strike at Libya tomorrow."

It had been almost seven years since an Israeli figure had made a statement comparable to Dayan's. In December 1974 Ephraim Katzir, then Israeli president, startled an audience of science writers by saying that Israel has "the potential to produce atomic bombs. If we need it, we will use it."

Dayan, who resigned as foreign minister in 1979 in protest against the way Begin was handling peace negotiations with Egypt, was defense minister from 1967 until 1974 and has intimate knowledge of Israel's military potential.

Now he is running for the Knesset (parliament) in the June 30 election at the head of an independent slate of candidates. Most polls predict he will win about four seats and be one of several pivotal figures in forming the next coalition government in the 120-seat parliament.

The implication of Dayan's statement was that Israel was well along the road to possessing nuclear weapons, as foreign press reports have claimed for years. Atomic bombs are built only after years of development, and some foreign press reports have said Israel had all the bomb components ready but not assembled, thus technically keeping to its pledge not to be the first to introduce the weapons to the Middle East.

Other reports say Israel has the weapons ready. In 1976 leaks from a briefing at the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency said that Israel had 10 to 20 nuclear bombs "ready and available for use."